



2015 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

I want to begin this morning by giving you fair warning. I'm going to veer away from the traditional 'eggs-and-overview' format of my previous State of the City addresses.

So if you came today expecting to snooze through a routine speech where I cite a laundry list of the City's accomplishments, you might want to buckle up.

While I'll acknowledge our past successes this morning, my real focus will be the challenge before us.

The truth is we are at a critical crossroads. As Johns Creek citizens, we must choose a path forward that ensures the economic viability of our City.

To do that we cannot step onto a path with signs reading, "This Way to the Status Quo," or "Turn Left for More of the Same."

We must choose the path that leads to a bold vision meant to define our community's legacy for generations to come.

Last year I used the words "scary" and "frightening" to describe what some of you are feeling about the HUGE steps we've got to take to maintain our slice of heaven that is Johns Creek.

To many those words would have been intimidating. But true to the Johns Creek spirit, you did not shrink from them. You responded that you want more for this place you call home, and you're willing to work for it.

So I am here today to put you to work. But rather than asking you to roll up your sleeves, I want you to put on your thinking caps. I want to capitalize on the tremendous brain power represented in this room today.

I want you to focus on your legacy. Not just the personal legacy you hope to leave for generations that come after you. But the legacy for Johns Creek embodied in each of us.

Today I'd like to challenge you to confidently step forward with me and **BE PART OF THE LEGACY** that defines Johns Creek.

Rest assured we are stepping forward onto a solid foundation. Consider some of the important legacies being created by the people sitting next to you this morning.

Take for example our gracious sponsors this morning at **Emory Johns Creek Hospital**. They're leaving a legacy of health and well-being for all of us. I'd like to congratulate **Marilyn Margolis** who was just recently named CEO of this outstanding institution. She's an asset to our community and her legacy is already well underway.

Our hosts for this event - the **Johns Creek Chamber of Commerce and the Johns Creek Business Association** – are business owners and corporate leaders leaving a strong financial legacy for our future.

The **Johns Creek Community Association**, critical to helping us promote this event every year, is made up of citizens intent on leaving a legacy of civic participation.

The arts community, including the **Johns Creek Symphony and Johns Creek Arts Center**, ensures a legacy of creative expression. No city is truly successful without a thriving arts community.

And of course **The Atlanta Athletic Club** – our beautiful backdrop for today's gathering - is fostering a legacy that preserves the reputation for championship golf unique to our area.

While I'm here representing them, I'd like to introduce my partners in this endeavor, the **Johns Creek City Council**. They are citizens who stepped forward to represent their friends and neighbors. I'd like to ask them to stand and be recognized as I call their names:

Council members **Lenny Zaprowski, Cori Davenport and Bob Gray**, and our **Mayor Pro-Tem Steve Broadbent**.

These exceptional individuals lead our city government on a legacy built on fiscal responsibility, transparency, and responsiveness. Thank you for your service.

I'd also like to thank former **Mayor Pro Tem Kelly Stewart** and former **councilman Brad Raffensperger** for their service. And I'd like to congratulate Brad on being elected to serve as our new Georgia House District 50 State Representative. We appreciate your continued support down at the Gold Dome.

And speaking of the Gold Dome, I'd like to ask **former State Representative Lynne Riley** to stand and be recognized. Lynne has worked tirelessly for Johns Creek as our Fulton County Commissioner, State Representative and now she has been tapped by Governor Deal as the new Georgia Revenue Commissioner. We're proud of you Lynne.

I'd like to recognize some of the other **dignitaries** joining us here this morning.

And while I'm acknowledging important people, I would be remiss not to introduce those who are at the heart of why I strive every day to build a legacy that will make them proud - **my children** Jake and Keri, as well as my lovely **fiancée** Lisa Butler. I'm blessed to be joined by my **mother and brother** as well. Thank you for your continual inspiration.

Let's explore the concept of legacy a little further. For those of you with children, your legacy may be the **extraordinary education** that you ensured for them by choosing to live where our schools set the bar high for hard work and achievement.

Many of you are engaged in your **churches and synagogues**. Your legacy will be supporting a local community of faith that encourages us to find our similarities rather than our differences.

Our hardworking Johns Creek team **is** building a legacy through their daily effort on behalf of our citizens. They not only work hard, but they work smart. Unlike most cities our size that have 8 to 10 employees per 1,000 residents, we get the same job done with slightly more than 3 employees per 1,000 residents. **Will all our staff here today please stand.**

Allow me to spend a moment reflecting on what these dedicated team members helped us accomplish in 2014. I promise to stick to the highlights as the details are in the **Annual Report** you have at your table.

Let's start with Public Works.

Last winter was something none of us will soon forget. The snowstorm that paralyzed metro Atlanta was blasted in images across the country and still haunts our region.

And while Johns Creek experienced its own share of snow, our citizens fared much better than most. Our **Public Works Department** anticipated

the impact and brought in extra equipment, salt and sand to keep our roads open.

But it wasn't just salt and sand that made the difference. It was also people like Johns Creek **Police Maj. John Clifton** who responded to a call that night of a school bus unable to climb a hill because of ice. On the bus was a special needs student, a teacher and the bus driver. Maj. Clifton drove the child home to his grateful parents who were unable to get out of their neighborhood. What a remarkable example of **exceptional** service.

Last year we made improvements on some of our most heavily traveled roads— **Old Alabama, Jones Bridge, and Medlock Bridge**. Key intersections were widened and new turn lanes were added – traffic is flowing a lot better this year.

We're committed to shortening your daily commute. Last year we added a **traffic management system** that uses cameras and a command center to relieve congestion and keep you moving.

But we don't just drive, so last year we built more than 2 miles of **sidewalks and trails** connecting schools, parks, neighborhoods, and shopping. And City crews **landscaped medians** on State Bridge Road and on Medlock Bridge Road so our public spaces are as attractive as our neighborhoods.

Our Public Works Department secured **\$33 million in federal funds** for these improvements. That's money that would have been left on the table had we not had a City to request and invest it in our community.

Now let's take a look at Recreation and Parks.

I know this is an area that is near and dear to many of you, and last year we knocked it out of the park – no pun intended.

The **Amphitheater** at Newtown Park offers residents and visitors a local alternative when they want to enjoy live music or intimate performances. This open air facility is a community amenity we'll be proud of for years to come.

Rogers Bridge, one of the oldest trestle bridges in the state, is an historic landmark for the Johns Creek community. Last year we partnered with Duluth, Gwinnett and Fulton counties, and the National Parks Service to restore it and connect our trail system with Duluth's Rogers Bridge Park. Hopefully through an ARC grant, we will be studying how to best bring new life to this historic structure.

Programs led by our Parks staff continued to thrive in 2014 with something for every age and interest. Kids flocked to our new Lego Camp, our active older adults kept **Park Place** buzzing with everything from Bridge to Zumba, and dog lovers enjoyed Pup-a-Palooza

We expanded our **Adaptive Recreation** program for our City's special needs residents and their families, a vital but underserved population. These programs will expand into Shakerag Park next year.

And we worked with the Johns Creek Veterans Association on the **Veterans Memorial Walk** inside Newtown Park that will be a model for the rest of the country.

Public Safety is another key area I'd like to address.

We know you place high value on knowing your family is protected. In 2014 we were named the 6th Safest City of our size in the U.S. and as the 2nd Safest City in Georgia (actually the safest large city).

We have the finest Police Department in the region, and we have the numbers to prove it. Last year **burglaries were down 30%** across the City.

The Department is also committed to service. Did you know that when you go out of town you can request a **police check of your home**? Officers physically walk around your house and look for anything suspicious. I can personally attest to how important this service is.

Effective policing doesn't stop with our uniformed officers. Our Police **Community Services Division** created community partners through our business and neighborhood watch programs, our Citizens Police Academy, and our Citizens Auxiliary Police program.

Our **Women's Safety** classes fill up as soon as we announce them. In fact my fiancé and 12-year-old daughter took this course and loved it.

Public safety is not complete without our **Fire Department**. When you have an emergency, you know the dedicated men and women of our Fire Department will be there within minutes.

Last year we partnered with Alpharetta to lower response times and add more resources in the northwestern part of our City. This also improves our insurance rating which means **lower insurance rates** for you.

When you dial 9-1-1 you expect immediate and expert assistance. **ChatComm**, the emergency communications partnership between Johns Creek, Sandy Springs, Dunwoody, and Brookhaven, became the first private sector 9-1-1 center in the U.S. to receive accreditation from CALEA.

During the height of last year's snowstorm, ChatComm managed nearly 5,000 calls a day - the number they typically handle in an entire week.

Let's talk for a moment about Community Development.

This department is on the frontlines of code enforcement to protect the City's character. In 2014 they worked with our businesses and citizens on a task force to hammer out a reasonable **compromise on our sign ordinance**.

In 2014 we also toughened our **massage establishment ordinance** in response to a concern across the metro Atlanta region about human trafficking. We hired an expert attorney and the City Council adopted a revised ordinance. Since then, seven establishments have closed. We will not tolerate human trafficking in Johns Creek!

There are some other key highlights worth mentioning.

We continue to focus on innovation, and in 2014 we launched **three new smart phone "apps"** to meet you where you are with technology. After all, if you have an app on your phone to buy coffee at Starbucks, you should have an app to report potholes. There are cards on your table that list each of our apps so you can download them later.

"JC Now" is an app developed internally at City Hall that lets us notify you of emergencies, and lets you easily find City Council agendas and maps. What's even more exceptional is this internally developed app beat out 16,000 other participants for first place at the ESRI International User Conference.

“JC Fix It” allows you to easily report issues like potholes and broken lights directly to our customer service staff.

The Johns Creek Police app called **“JCPD4Me”** lets you file complaints, access police records, and view daily crime bulletins.

At this pace, there’ll be an app next year for you to **rate me on my speech** in real time. But honestly I hope we’ll stick with coffee and potholes for now.

Transparency is also our focus. On March 16th we’ll begin **live-streaming** and archiving video of City Council work sessions and regular Council meetings.

You can go to our website, click on a button and watch the meetings in real time, or if you miss a meeting you can watch an archived video. We’ll also soon be adding our Planning Commission and the Board of Zoning Appeals meetings as well. Providing **access to government in action is essential**, and we want you to be informed and involved.

Some of you may have noticed my **lapel pin** today. I’m very proud to wear it as an introduction to the new brand we adopted last year with the tagline **“Be the Exception.”**

Selecting the new brand was not a casual process. We collaborated with the Johns Creek Chamber of Commerce, Johns Creek Advantage, and the Johns Creek Convention and Visitors Bureau in conducting surveys of the community. The goal was to capture the essence of **what sets Johns Creek apart** and I believe we succeeded.

I’d like to read just a portion of the **branding narrative** that I think says it all.

“You don’t get ahead by following the crowd. Or settling into the comfort of the status quo. Successful people set one personal goal after another and work hard to accomplish them. They change rules, look for better ways, rewrite history and usher in progress.

Perhaps that’s why leaders and achievers are attracted to Johns Creek. Because we aren’t satisfied with the status quo either. Johns Creek is the exception to the everyday.”

That’s the perfect lead-in to the next portion of my remarks. Let’s stop here for a moment as we have something we’d like you to see.

VIDEO

- Make no mistake – As I said earlier **Johns Creek and its citizens are at a critical crossroads of economic viability, and the path forward requires a bold vision that will define our legacy for generations to come.**
- While we’re here today to celebrate our **accomplishments** over the past year, we must now focus on the **future**.
- Those of you who know me know that **I prefer to be candid**, so allow me to candidly outline the issues before us.
- Please note that I said **“issues” not “issue”** – our challenges cannot be reduced to a single talking point.
- It’s likely that some of the issues I’ll point out today may be things you haven’t considered.

- But I believe we must acknowledge **ALL our challenges** in order to tackle them head on.

The first and most critical ISSUE before us is that Johns Creek lacks a healthy, sustainable tax base.

- **Homeowners are disproportionately supporting the local tax base**, contributing to 81% of total property tax digest versus 19% from commercial taxpayers.
- Imagine what we could do by **moving toward a more equitable balance** - increasing the commercial percentage to 25% or 35%, and dropping the homeowners' percentage to 75% or 65%.
- And keep in mind – **commercial areas contribute more than just property taxes**. They pay for business licenses, alcohol permits, sales taxes, hotel/motel taxes and other important revenue sources.
- So a stronger commercial area adds value all around.
- While we're talking about revenues, **let's talk about expenses**. We're facing more than **\$130 million** in pent-up capital needs over the next 10 years.
- That's just the estimate for the next **decade** – aging roadways, bridges and other infrastructure will need significant investment well into the future.
- The truth is we **inherited a system** that was **neglected** for too long – we cannot **burden our children** with those same mistakes by putting it off any longer.

- And that \$130 million is **above and beyond our everyday costs** just to keep the City running.
- **What does that mean to you?**
- **Levels of service** throughout Johns Creek and needed improvements to those services **will begin to suffer over time** unless we acknowledge and fix the imbalance in our tax digest.
- Let me put that in terms of “**where the rubber meets the road.**”
- Without a stronger commercial tax base to serve as the **engine that generates revenue**, residential property taxpayers are eventually going to have to **pay more to maintain neighborhood services.**
- Things we all value greatly - park improvements, neighborhood repaving, traffic improvements, and public safety services.
- We’re not talking about **service levels dropping off overnight.** But if we maintain the status quo, our choices in the coming years will be limited to **reducing service levels or raising taxes.**
- And as I’ve said in the past, as long as I am your Mayor I will not support a **residential tax hike.**

The second ISSUE we are facing is that families in Johns Creek are not putting down lifelong roots.

- We continue to attract quality **families.** In fact we’ve been ranked **14th out of the 50 best cities in America for families.** We were the only city in Georgia to clear the top 50.
- But despite these accolades, many families don’t call Johns Creek home once the **kids are out of school.**

- In order to thrive for the long-term, we need families with their **roots deeply planted** here.
- We need a **downtown** with a sense of a place that serves as a community center that **anchors us** and keeps families here.

The third ISSUE we must address is that Johns Creek must enhance its competitive identity to level the playing field with our neighboring communities.

- You may not know it but Johns Creek is **among the top 2 percent of largest cities in the U.S. in terms of population**. Out of almost 20,000 nationwide, Johns Creek is number 389.
- Yet unlike those cities, **we lack a central business district – a downtown** so to speak.
- Cities that have a downtown filled with people, entertainment, restaurants, businesses, and shopping are places that attract those **who spend their money here and not somewhere else**.
- Central business areas attract ***“foodies,”*** arts and culture aficionados, and others looking for a more refined or fun family experience.
- A downtown serves as a place to **proudly take family and friends** when they are in town or meet up when they are local.
- Without a central business district – a downtown gathering spot - upscale restaurants, great businesses, high-end retailers, entertainment, and hotels **choose to locate in communities that do offer that experience**.
- Companies want to book hotel rooms for visiting executives in communities that have upscale hotels.

- **Right now those opportunities are lost** to us in Johns Creek.
- That's revenue that is not collected locally.
- What cities with a downtown show us is that **when you have more, you attract more.**
- So when we have upscale restaurants, we'll attract more upscale restaurants. When we have entertainment options, we'll attract more entertainment options. **Success breeds success.**
- What we also know is that a central business district not only grows the tax digest but it **protects local neighborhoods from sprawl.** Development is concentrated in one area instead of bumping up against **residential communities.**
- Concentrating development in a central business district also allows traffic to be better managed traffic and provides revenue to deal with traffic impact throughout the City.

The fourth ISSUE confronting us is that Johns Creek is not retaining and attracting enough young professionals.

- Strong corporate employers look for a **young, vibrant workforce** of business professionals when choosing where to locate.
- When corporations look to Johns Creek as a **potential location**, they unfortunately do not find enough of the young professionals who they view as their **lifeblood.**
- Sadly, many of our **best and brightest graduates move away** from Johns Creek after college and do not return to be long-term members of the community.

- And the **high achievers entering the workforce** from the many colleges and universities surrounding Johns Creek look elsewhere as well.
- We don't have the kind of housing, convenient dining, shopping and social gathering spots they're looking for.

In the face of all these challenges, what is the SOLUTION?

- Last year I introduced an ambitious initiative deemed "***The District.***"
- The concept is to transform a 728-acre area centered around **Technology Park into a downtown sense of place and community destination.**
- The District will serve as the catalyst to transform Johns Creek into a world-class city that reflects the best of the Johns Creek community.
- The District will increase our **competitive identity** with surrounding communities.
- It will provide an increased commercial tax base to support the high quality services you expect.
- By concentrating development within The District, **residential areas will be protected from sprawl.** The District is only 728 acres of the City's more than 20,000 acres. Put into visual terms, if the City were an envelope, The District would be the size of a stamp.
- **Young professionals** will find a community that fits their **current lifestyle.**
- But most importantly, The District is that **bold vision required to move the needle forward** and shift the bulk of the tax burden from residential

property owners to a more **sustainable mix** of commercial contributions.

- Here is the **reality** that I want to make clear today - we can't do this with more shopping centers of nail salons, dry cleaners, and grocery stores. The truth is we can't even do this by filling up all the existing office space in The District today.
- Let me go one step further. To build a more sustainable and balanced tax digest, The District **cannot** be a downtown **Duluth or Suwanee**, and it can't be **Avalon**. In fact you could put almost eight Avalon's within The District.
- Don't get me wrong – those are fantastic destinations. But they are on a much smaller scale than we're aiming for.
- The bottom line is we must have a well-planned central business district that uses land efficiently by **going vertical**.
- **Why vertical?** Because we must maximize the tax revenue per acre.
- Let me give you a comparison. Right now in Johns Creek our commercial properties contribute about a third of what Sandy Springs collects. Alpharetta and Roswell collect twice what we do.
- Currently a full quarter of land within The District – 172 acres - is surface parking. What a terrible waste of prime real estate that could be heavily contributing to our tax digest.
- **So how do we right the ship?**

- First we have to stop comparing ourselves to local communities and instead think places like downtown **Montreal**. If that sounds like an exaggeration, consider this - Montreal is 698 acres. The District encompasses 728 acres.
- Here's another example of the scale we're working toward. **Downtown Charlotte** is 255 acres. You **could put three** downtown Charlottes within The District.
- Let's not stop there. The **Paris** business district is 452 acres. The District is **nearly twice that size**.
- That's the scale we're talking about here in order to make the kind of **impact** we need.
- But we're **not just talking vertical**. In fact you'll be able to look around and see the sky when you're in The District, but your focus will be on the street level energy around you.
- We need to go **fully integrated at the street level** which is why Montreal and Paris are great examples of the type of vibrancy I mean.
- Most of you have been to places like Montreal, Paris or **New York**. You know that everything you need is within walking distance or a short cab ride. The same will be true of the District.
- That's the type of integrated street level environment The District will create – **a place of vibrancy as well as prosperity**.
- We will be creating a city within a city. Or as I like to say, we'll be bringing just the right amount of well-planned urban to the suburban.
- The District will be the **biggest development the metro area has seen, and nothing like this has ever been done in the State of Georgia**.

- My vision for Johns Creek is to literally be **the downtown of choice for north metro Atlanta**, built from the ground up on the hard lessons learned from other people's success and mistakes.
- We like to say that Johns Creek is the ungovernment of governments. The District will be the ***"undowntown" of downtowns*** because we will do the hard work upfront to get it right.
- It can be done and it will be done right here in Johns Creek.
- Johns Creek is an exceptional community, and **exceptional ideas are needed to make The District a reality**.
- Remember those **thinking caps** I asked you to put on earlier? Pull them down snugly because here's where we need them.
- The City has commissioned a **multi-disciplined team** of national experts to develop a master plan for The District guided by your input.
- Led by **Urban Design Associates**, a well-respected and experienced design and architecture firm, the team also includes **experts** in transportation, land use, real estate, and retail economics to ensure every aspect has been considered and well planned out.
- **Active participation** in public input meetings is needed to ensure the District solves our **economic viability challenge** but also represents **your vision** of Johns Creek.
- We'll have multiple opportunities for you to engage including a series of design studies and community meetings in mid-April.
- I hope you'll all be on the lookout as we send more detailed information on those sessions, and that you'll **put them on your calendar and participate**.

- Johns Creek citizens and community leaders like you **MUST take ownership of the community's legacy** by engaging in the Master Plan process.
- At this point The District is a conversation, not a foregone conclusion. We are asking each citizen to help us paint the picture of what Johns Creek should be.
- We need you to **collaborate on the outcomes** from the Master Planning process to bring The District to life.
- We need to accept the **short-term changes** will be necessary to ensure our **long-term best interests**.
- We need each of you to be **ambassadors** for the kind of great ideas we're looking for. So as you leave today, I'm asking each of you to take a "thinking cap" with you.
- Wear it proudly as a member of 'Team Johns Creek' working together on a **legacy** we can look back on and say "I was a part of that."
- You are the **history makers** who will determine what Johns Creek looks like 20, 50 and 100 years from now.
- **You ARE a part of our legacy**, and I thank each of you for your exceptional contributions. I can't wait to see what the future holds for us.